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ABSTRACT

Tutors are true professionals who understand that even though their own philosophical stance toward teaching may differ from an instructor's, they have an obligation to do whatever the professor requires. However, because they work more closely with them, the tutors are in a better position than the teacher to see when the students are having trouble. It is then their responsibility to communicate those problems to the teacher. The tutor is obliged to be careful, and many times to protect the student--possibly against a teacher whose teaching style appears threatening to the student. The tutorial method involves having the student learn from three different activities--working alone, observing the mistakes that were made and defending points believed to be right, and looking over the completed and corrected work and comparing it with the original assignment and the first draft. The single most important reason for the one-on-one experience with the tutor is that it provides a support system. In this sense the tutor helps the student develop the ability to adapt to standards, authority figures, and a very large institution with an approach that is both instinctive and intellectual: taking nothing for granted where the individual's learning is concerned, but incorporating respect and humor into the tutoring process. (HOD)

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A Philosophy of Tutoring

Joan P. Grimm

To establish my credentials as a person worth listening to on the subject of tutoring, I'll give you a general picture of the Developmental English program at University College. Students are given a placement test during the summer before they matriculate, to determine whether they will take regular Freshman English or English for Effective Communication and its co-requisite, Reading And Study. If they take English for Effective Communication, they attend class four days a week for 3 credit hours. Two days are regular class days with only the instructor present, while two are so-called "lab" days, when two tutors join the teacher for one-on-one instruction, doing work on grammar, writing, analyzing a short story - whatever. The Writing Lab, located near all of the E. E. C. classrooms, is open seven hours a day, four days a week. At least one tutor is on duty at all times to work with those students who "drop in" for help. The Reading and Study Lab and classrooms are also nearby, so that the geographical locations help coordinate the programs. I teach classes in English for Effective Communication.

Tutors and teachers work well together, as would be expected. One reason for this is that the tutors are true professionals, who understand that even though their own philosophical stance toward teaching may differ from an instructor's, they have an obligation to do whatever the professor requires. Doing otherwise would discredit the teacher and interfere with the student-teacher relationship. On the other hand, the tutors are in a better

position than the teacher to see when the students are having trouble, because they work more closely with them. It is then their responsibility to communicate the problems to the teacher. Obviously, there must be good communication between the tutor and the teacher, and we are fortunate in our program to have that.

Now, let's get down to the nitty-gritty. What is a tutor? What is the tutorial method? I suppose when any of us thinks of the origin of tutoring, he involuntarily thinks of Socrates, who is said to be the method's inventor. His open-air approach is a far cry from our modern school systems, but let me show you how some very, very old, bordering on ancient quotations used to illustrate several definitions of "tutor" - noun - in the Oxford English Dictionary, are amazingly apropos for today.

Definition One

A guardian, custodian, keeper; a protector, defender. In 1562, James Pilkington, in An Exposition Upon Abdyas, wrote, "The poore oppressed people, whom God takes in to his custodie to be their tutor."

The modern tutor is a custodian, in a sense, for he or she must feel a certain responsibility for the welfare of the student.

Definition Two

One who has the custody of a ward; a guardian. In 1642, Thomas Fuller, refers, in The Holy and Profane State, to "That interest which carefull tutours claim in those whose protection they tender."

The tutor today is obliged to be careful, and many times to protect his charge - possibly against a teacher whose teaching style appears threatening to the student. The responsibility of the tutor in this situation is to differentiate between universal principles of writing and the idiosyncracies of the individual teacher.

Definition Three

One employed in the supervision and instruction of a youth in a private household.

Obviously we aren't working in a private household, but can we deny that we frequently do indeed act "in loco parentis?" In 1822, Shelley, in Triumph of Life, wrote, "The tutor and his pupil, whom Dominion Followed as tame as vulture in a chain." This isn't really apropos today, because although I think I've had some students who came close to being vultures, or something equally unpleasant, they were certainly not tame. However, the last thing we want to do is put them in chains. Modern tutors are allies rather than monarchs.

Definition Four

In the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin: A graduate, (most often the fellow of the college), to whom the special supervision of an undergraduate (called his pupil) is assigned.

In 1695, a man named Phillips, whose full name was not revealed, perhaps for good reason, made the statement

that "A tutor in the University, is one that takes care to teach and instruct the Youth that are sent thither from inferior schools." Of course we still manage to complain about the inferiority of the schools who send us their ill-prepared youth, but we and our tutors are trying, with all the skills and facilities at our command, to overcome this lack of preparation.

That would seem to take care, at least temporarily, of the definitions of tutor. Historically, we associate the tutorial method with Oxford, Cambridge and other special schools, and that particular kind of tutorial method is probably best described by Gilbert Highet, in The Art of Teaching. I quote from Highet: "The methods may vary but the principle is nearly always the same. The pupil prepares a body of work by himself. He takes it for criticism and correction to the tutor, who then goes over it with the greatest possible thoroughness. The pupil learns from three different activities: First, from doing his own work alone; second, from observing the mistakes he has made and also from defending himself on points where he believes he is right; third, from looking over the completed and corrected work and comparing it with the original assignment and his first draft."

Tutor. Tutorial method. Now - what is the basic philosophical underpinning of all this, and how is that philosophy borne out in modern tutoring? To answer the first question, I considered some of John Locke's works, especially his "Thoughts Concerning Education," 1693, and "The Conduct of the Understanding," published

posthumously in 1706, and came to the realization that much of what Locke wrote in the 17th century, about the instinctual nature of man, is hard to argue against, today or at any time. Locke determined that to the tutor, the instinctual nature of man offers both opposition and assistance. He said that men are equipped with six "wants of nature" (instinctual desires): the desire to secure bodily pleasure and to avoid bodily pain, the desire to exercise power by controlling others and by possessing things, the desire to be free of external control, the desire to be publicly approved and not to be disapproved, the desire to find out the truth about things that catch one's attention and the desire to be relieved of boredom with activity of one kind by engaging in activity of another kind. His prescription for frustrating the undesirable instincts and encouraging the positive ones is irrelevant today. The young individual who comes into our classroom or reading or writing lab for the first time is the product, of course, of influences over which we, the teacher and tutor, have had no control. We can, however, take a page from Locke's book, as it were, when he writes: "The desire for approval is often so strong that it can be used to offset the effects of instincts toward pleasure and away from power."

If we substitute "laziness" for pleasure, and "fright" for power, we have a better understanding of the situation tutors face today in the classroom and in the writing and reading labs. I quote Jenny Alden, tutor; on the subject of fright: "The student must develop the ability to adapt to standards, authority figures, and a very large institution. Even the buildings of

the college are forbidding, especially to the inner city child who has rarely ventured out of his neighborhood. Through his continuous one-on-one contact with a tutor, these strange buildings can become accessible to him. He learns finally to cope with the system."

To emphasize the importance of this affective learning that takes place during tutoring, I quote tutor Judith Krekkeler: "The single most important reason for the one-on-one experience with the tutor is to provide a support system. For the developmental student, especially the black student who most frequently comes from an extended family, college is a culture shock. This shock is buffered by a support system - involving peers or professionals." Just a note of caution here. According to Judith, "You have to do a great deal for the student in order for him to trust you, but there is a tendency to do too much. You must be able to perceive the point at which you must begin to back off, begin to remove some support so that the student can stand by himself." The experienced tutor can sense the onset of that phase of the relationship.

As illustration of that phenomenon, and again, to demonstrate that we are not so far removed philosophically from our forebears, let me return to Locke's essay, "Thoughts Concerning Education," where he says, "The third part of the tutor's method is that of discovering the child's particular interests and capacities. Although all the natural desires are present in every person, their relative strengths differ from one to another. Consequently, the tutor cannot know in advance which of them to appeal to in

a concrete teaching situation or how strongly to rely upon those to which he does appeal.

Judith, again, a tutor, told me of an experience she had had with a student, who, as she put it, "had great charm and absolutely zero writing and spelling skills." He was not in any of the classes which she tutored, but his instructor felt that she, particularly, might be able to help him outside of class in the drop-in lab. His reason for thinking of Judith was that the young man had written, as the final sentence (and only non-fragment in the paragraph, I might add) of his first assigned paragraph: "You can do anything with a piano, even end a paragraph with it." Gary, his instructor, knew of Judith's passionate enjoyment of music, especially the music of Bach, who is also a favorite of the young man's. So - when this student reported to the drop-in lab, she was prepared. Recognizing his name, she told him, "We have a special bond because of Johann Sebastian." She then gave him a list of all of her drop-in hours, her regular class hours, and her home phone number, feeling that he was in need of a great deal of support. The initial realization of the student's special love of music made this relationship possible.

The young man managed only an incomplete for E. E. C. for Autumn Quarter, and then had to change to another teacher for Winter Quarter for some reason or other. His new instructor coincidentally was also the fellow's student advisor, and because of this he discovered that the only passing grade he had received for Autumn Quarter was the Incomplete in English - all the rest

were F's.

The outlook seemed bleak, especially since the new instructor uses sentence combining, a technique that the student found difficult. He had spent the first quarter learning to write main clauses, and now he was being told to subordinate, a problem he had been trying to overcome. Actually, he was terrified of subordinating, using only main clauses because "they're safe." By the end of the quarter, even though he had worked hard and improved a great deal, he still felt insecure. He phoned Judith to ask her, in effect, to say that he had turned some particular paper in on time, when she in fact had no way of knowing whether he had or not. He persisted, but at that point she realized that some support had to be removed. She had to let him know, seriously, that "I won't do more than a certain amount for you."

The story has a happy ending, you'll probably be glad to know. The student made up the Incomplete, and managed to get a B for the Winter Quarter in his English course, based on a quite rigid point system used by his teacher - so it was no giveaway. But I can hopefully surmise that he gained far more than that B - the knowledge that he is capable of learning, no matter how difficult the material may appear, and that he can do it on his own. For this we can give credit to his "particular interest" in music, and to his compassionate but professional tutor.

I had prepared some other deep and perceptive statements on the philosophy of tutoring, but instead I'm going to offer you something far better. Recently several of our tutors and I were engaged in a discussion of feelings, attitudes, and philos-

ophies about teaching and tutoring. One of the tutors, Joanne Ard, said she would like to give the whole matter some intense thought and write down the results. I was so impressed with her perceptions that I have set aside the rest of what I had prepared, and am offering you here these brief but uncut reflections. (I think I also want to brag a bit in showing the quality of our professional tutors.)

I am indebted to Joanne Ard for the following:

TUTORING

I thought of a phrase I've always remembered from D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow - "absorbed in the passion of instruction." It's such a universal preoccupation: parents, preachers, psychologists, nurses, (some) politicians, artisans and craftsmen, and all artists succumb to its power; little children teach smaller ones, and mad persons walk down the streets instructing aloud, and anyone at all loves to tell you how his job is done or how to cook something, sew something, grow something, what the weather man said, their diet plan.

So I thought about its nature - this urge to "impart knowledge," as the dictionary says. And it seems to me that even physical love is (at least if not debased) an instruction in oneself to the loved one, in part. Therefore the love of teaching, in all people as it is from young children to aged wise men, must be the natural function of the desire to communicate, the impulse which makes us human.

Thus diffused, the passion to instruct of course takes very many forms, too many to summarize. The form it takes with me

specifically, now that I've considered, is to want to mingle two methods: intellectual and instinctual.

My intellectual method is to:

1. Assume some (quickly determined as best I can) locus of ignorance in the individual.
2. Begin there. Make no allusions; if a tangential matter needs to be incorporated, explain it. For example, if the student asks me about the subordinate clause, I say, "Do you know what a main clause is?" assuming he doesn't. If he says "Yes," I say, "What is it?" And so on.
3. Do not fear explaining more than I am asked; it is almost always necessary. With experience a competent instructor will go only far enough to clarify a little area around the present puzzle.

My instinctual method is to:

1. Feel respect, whatever the student's outward demeanor. This often modifies an unfavorable demeanor, and in mutual respect, which follows, is relaxation - allowing the pleasure of learning for the student.
2. Place limits openly when needed: "Now I think if you really read the material instead of trying to get me to do it for you, you'll do pretty well . . . then come back to me and let me check it out." Surprisingly often, the student who needs this sort of remark will admit his own shortcoming and respect your spotting it.
3. Exercise humor, which removes authoritarianism from instruction and helps make it what it is that means communication: a

joint endeavor.

However, the catch is that my instinctual method is a part of all the teaching in life which is affective; while my intellectual method is a professional one. It takes a true turn for instruction as an occupation, to grasp and implement a teaching method derived from intellectual reflection. Thus anyone can teach someone something; but not everyone can teach almost anyone a specific subject.

I want to end with the observation that these remarks, while they are applicable to classroom teaching, don't address the classroom psychology. (So they're just tutoring philosophy.)

Afterthought: Even the instinctual method has a catch . . . one who deals with the public in any capacity with success, has to regard each comer as an individual, worthy of respect, frankness, and humor; but also as a member of a type, and not mind too much either that nearly everyone belongs to one type or another.